



Career Transition Education Resources

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Abstract

Career transition can be a daunting process for many workers who are unsatisfied with their current careers, or who find that their skills are becoming outdated. Colleges and universities, state job service agencies, private companies, and even some employers are all ready to help workers by offering job training, tools for job searching, and tips for interviewing and writing effective résumés and cover letters. Resources are also available for workers transitioning into retirement or for those who are considering starting a small business.

Overview

In previous generations, most people spent their adult lives working for a single company and expected to remain at that

company until retirement. Only in a few fields, such as dance or professional sports, were career transitions deemed natural, because, after a certain age, the professionals could no longer physically perform what was required of them. Today this is no longer the case.

The workplace has become rapidly changing environment. In the wake of downsizing, restructuring, corporate takeovers, and outsourcing, jobs that were once believed to offer lifelong job security no longer have such guarantees. In 2001, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that over 21,000 employees were laid off and almost 2.5 million people filed for unemployment insurance – the largest number of people to do so in 30 years. The 2007-2009 recession and global financial crisis were accompanied by massive layoffs in the United States. In 2012, after a prolonged contraction of the economy, hiring increased modestly and company downsizing leveled off somewhat. Even so, 12.2 million people were unemployed (Williamson, 2012). Company relocations, mergers, and technological advances often result in job loss. In the past, the unemployed tended to be stigmatized. However, as more and more workers go through job loss, unemployment is becoming more acceptable. It is no longer seen as always being the individual's fault. With this change in perception, it is easier for adults with the necessary skills to make a transition from one job to another (Gale, 2003).

Because of the volatile job market, many adults have had to either voluntarily or involuntarily reevaluate their careers. For some, this can be a time of opportunity. Regardless of how a career transition happens, there are many resources to help adults acquire the skills and knowledge needed to begin a new career. Some of these resources are offered by government or social service agencies, some are available through colleges and universities in the form of education and other support services, some come in the form of partnerships, and some are even offered by employers.

Applications

State & Local Resources

State and local job service agencies are one resource for adults considering a career change. Many now have websites that anyone can access. These sites have links to local newspapers, employer websites, job postings, labor market information, and

other resources. Local job service offices advertise state and federal government openings as well as local job openings, and most offices update their listings daily. Job service offices may also offer computers with software packages that can help clients create résumés and cover letters, as well as internet access so clients can search online job postings. Most offices also have career libraries. These services are offered free of charge.

States can also use workforce development funds to improve local and regional economies through job training, job retraining, unemployment insurance, and other benefits. For example, if voters pass a table gaming bill allowing card games and roulette to be played at establishments that already offer video slot machines, a specialized workforce will be needed. A gaming establishment may already have employees and be willing to pay for their training and certification at a local college, but new employees will also be needed to fill the new jobs. A state workforce development office may cover the training and certification costs for other, unemployed adults in an effort to help them gain employment.

The federal Small Business Administration also provides resources for entrepreneurs through its Small Business Development Center Program, which is designed to give help, both technical and managerial, to current and prospective small business owners.

College & University Resources

Colleges and universities can also provide useful resources. For workers who do not like their jobs and are thinking of making a career change, or for those who are no longer employed, many colleges have career centers with professional counselors who can help workers assess their skills and interests to determine what professions may be best. Counselors can administer interest inventories, assist with résumé development, help their clients write an effective cover letter, and conduct mock interviews. Career centers may also offer internet access, or a career library. Career centers or community and continuing education departments may also offer career development workshops on topics like résumé writing, career planning, interviewing, networking, stress management, leadership skills, effective communication, and job search techniques. These workshops are usually presented free of charge if offered through a college's career center or placement office. However, there may be a nominal fee if the workshops are offered through a community and continuing education department.

Career centers can also help adults who are preparing for retirement but would like to continue working after they retire. These adults can speak with a counselor about what aspects of their current position they like and what aspects they would rather avoid in a new position.

Partnerships

Some businesses work with private companies to develop transition programs which will prepare their employees to move into

other positions in the company. These companies come to the business or train off-site at their own offices or a hotel. They charge on either a per-person basis or by the group. Private companies can also assist businesses through a staff reduction by providing assessment and guidance services to people who will be losing their jobs. They can provide career assessment through computerized and paper-and-pencil inventories, offer career planning and exploration, and help with goal setting. They can also design and present customized workshops for the affected employees, help them with résumé and cover letter development, and provide appropriate feedback.

Employer Resources

Today, many employers are seeing the benefits of offering career transition services internally. Internal services can save a company money on recruitment, training, and outplacement costs. By providing career transition services, these employers can also define their own career paths for future consideration and for the recruitment of new employees. And the career counseling they provide can not only lessen the stress of downsizing – and thereby mitigate negative publicity – but also train current employees for new jobs within the company (Kleiman, 1985, as cited in Boulmetis, 1997).

In order to offer these services, companies must have adult educators who can help employees develop the skills and knowledge needed to make the career transition successful. They must also have human resource personnel or counselors who are capable of providing support and promoting career transition to employees. Educators and counselors should have knowledge and skills similar to those of human resource management, training, and development professionals. These include adult learning theory and development, program design, group facilitation, and consulting skills (Chalofsky & Gerstein, 1985, as cited in Boulmetis, 1997).

Adult Education Classroom

State resources such as unemployment insurance are often provided with the stipulation that the beneficiaries must be willing to train for a new career. For adults who are going back into the classroom after years or decades in the workforce, this can be a difficult transition. For adults who have never had formal training, it can be even more challenging.

For instance, if a local coal mine shuts down, hundreds of people may lose their jobs. Many of these men and women began working in the mines just after or even before they graduated high school, and have forgotten a lot of what they learned. When they enroll in college for re-training, their placement test scores will probably indicate that they need to be placed in remedial courses. But basic reading and math courses won't interest them because the only reason they are attending college is to extend their benefits until the mine reopens, which may or may not happen.

Colleges, therefore, need to adapt their usual teaching strategies in order to better serve these students. This might include creat-

ing special cohort classes so these students can attend classes together for additional support, or appointing special counselors or advisors to them to build a trusting relationship in which the students feel free to ask questions and seek advice. Counselors and advisors can also be key to their clients' success by helping them be open to career change, helping them evaluate their skills and interests to match them to available jobs, and by reassuring them that their efforts will pay off in the end.

Community & Technical Colleges

Community and technical colleges have a special role in workforce training. They are known for quickly adapting to changing economies, and offer the communities they serve new degrees and certifications in cutting-edge skills and technology. In August 2007, the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration announced that it would be giving community and technical colleges \$125 million in grant funds to build community-based job training in high-growth and high-demand industries. These funds were meant to build capacity and develop training activities over a number of years, enabling the colleges to train students for careers in local and regional economies (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007). Though many community colleges experienced budget cuts during and after the 2007-2009 recession, a strong correlation was made between falling employment and escalating community college enrollment (Hillman & Orians, 2013).

Community colleges can also work with incoming businesses and industries to train the workforce in the skills they will need to obtain a job with a region's new employers. If a company is considering relocating to a certain area, they may contact the local college to discuss setting up training sessions for potential employees. These sessions may be offered free of charge with the incoming company paying the training costs. The company describes the skills they need their employees to have, and the college is responsible for setting up and conducting the training. For example, a customer service company may require its employees to have basic computer and telephone skills. To meet that need, the college would offer training in the company's operating system as well as basic telephone etiquette. The college may also go a step further by including components on résumé and cover letter writing as well as interview skills to ensure that students have the confidence to apply for a job and interview with hiring personnel.

Private Companies

With the new instability of the job market, there are now companies that offer seminars targeted especially towards adults who are facing downsizing or a base closure, considering retirement, resigning voluntarily, being forced to leave their current position, or voluntarily or involuntarily retiring. Lasting anywhere from a half day to three days, these seminars focus on how workers can deal with career change as well as how they can find another job or become self-employed. Some of the topics covered include:

- Balancing change and career
- Building professional trust
- Career transition training
- Conquering procrastination
- Coping with workplace anxiety and depression
- Eliminating fear and worry in the workplace
- Effective anger control
- Entrepreneurship
- Starting a small business
- Writing a business plan
- Interviewing for the job you want
- Life after a government career
- Managing organizational change
- Résumé writing
- Reversing the effects of downsizing
- Test taking tips and skills

Objectives of courses such as these include:

- Using positive steps to get a job
- Analyzing talents
- Marketable skills and areas of interest
- Determining which jobs to go after
- Overcoming barriers to a successful job hunt
- Developing an action plan for getting a job
- Learning how to tap the hidden job market
- Understanding what it takes to get a job interview
- Following up on job interviews
- Developing support systems and networks
- Using job plans to get a job right now (J & K Associates, Inc., 2006).

Entrepreneurship

The federal Small Business Administration's Small Business Development Centers are located throughout the country, and services are provided free of charge. These centers provide one-stop assistance to people and businesses by giving them all forms of advice and guidance. There is at least one Small Business Development Center in every state with more than 1,100 local subcenters and satellite locations nationwide. They are often housed on a community college or university campus, but

they can also be located within a chamber of commerce or a local economic development corporation. These centers work with individuals from professional and trade associations, the legal and banking communities, local colleges and universities, and chambers of commerce to provide expertise in all aspects of owning a small business. A Small Business Development Center can:

- Offer counseling, training, and technical assistance for every element of small business management, such as the studies of their financial, marketing, and production organization states
- Help aspiring business owners develop a business plan to secure bank funds
- Assist with trade, procurement aid, venture capital formation, and rural development internationally
- Help their clients apply for state and federal business grants
- Provide a variety of workshops and seminars, publications, financial programs, and contract assistance to help new business owners succeed (Small Business Administration, n.d.)

Conclusion

Workers who are thinking of voluntarily leaving their current position need to think carefully before making a decision. To be successful, they must identify their ultimate goal, the steps necessary to reach that goal, and any obstacles they may face, as well as develop strategies to overcome these obstacles. If a lack of credentials is an obstacle, then he or she could go back to school or take a night class. A network of support from family, friends, and mentors can ease the transition and help the person think things through. People who are changing careers also need to have a backup plan and an emergency fund in case unexpected difficulties pop up (Woods, 2002).

While an employee can do very little once a company is sold, decides to downsize, or completely closes down, there are a few things he or she can do beforehand to make it easier to find employment, such as gaining additional knowledge, learning new skills, and getting more experience in the field. According to Custard (2007), employees can:

- Build a reputation for professional excellence among a wide network of contacts
- Obtain additional training or credentials whenever the opportunity arises
- Take a course
- Enhance their computer skills
- Build and grow a network of professional contacts

- Pursue an undergraduate or advanced degree
- Gain experience outside their field by volunteering for temporary assignments
- Become active in professional organizations by volunteering for a board position or volunteering to work at regional or national conferences (Custard, 2007).

Job security is far less common than it used to be. However, the volatility and instability of the job market does not have to be intimidating. While no one wants to be put in the position of having to start over again, there are many free resources which can help with the transition in both practical and emotional terms. For some, losing a job can be viewed as an opportunity – the event that provides the impetus to do what they have always wanted to do but were too afraid to try. The United States economy may never be able to offer complete job security again, so it is important to be aware of the available resources and use them to keep skills current and marketable.

Terms & Concepts

Career Assessment: Tests that are designed to help people understand their interests, values, aptitudes, and skills and how these all impacts their potential success and satisfaction with different career options.

Career Counselor: A professional who helps people clarify their life or career goals, administers and interprets assessments and inventories to assess abilities and interests to identify career options, helps develop career plans, teaches strategies and skills for job hunting, assists in the development of résumés and cover letters, and helps with anything that is required for a job search.

Career Transition: A state in which employees change jobs within a company or corporation or find an entirely different occupation with another employer.

Corporate Takeover: The act of assuming control or management of a company and usually occurs when a large company takes over a smaller company.

Downsizing: A corporate strategy in which a company reduces its size and complexity in order to increase its efficiency and profitability.

Mock Interview: A practice interview that can be videotaped, allowing for constructive feedback and better interview preparation.

Outsourcing: An arrangement in which an organization contracts with another organization to perform functions traditionally handled by internal staff.

Small Business Development Center: A government program established in 1976 with the mission of providing management assistance to established and prospective small business owners.

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